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ABSTRACT

Members of nuclear families look to one another for support in times of stress. Relationships between spouses and between parents and children contain the conditions required for effective counselling and helping. This paper presents the results of two tests of the hypothesis that such helping relationships in families act as moderators between the experienced stress and resultant well-being of family members. In the first study, 89 married husband-wife pairs indicated (1) the amount of stress they experienced in their jobs and daily living, (2) their satisfaction with the help they received from their spouses, and (3) perceptions of their satisfaction and well-being in four areas: job, life, marriage, and mental and physical well-being. In the second study 274 male and female adolescents indicated (1) the amount of stress they experienced in their day-to-day living, (2) their satisfaction with the help they received from their mothers, fathers, and peers, and (3) perceptions of their well-being in three conceptually distinct areas (life satisfaction, various affective states, and mental and physical well-being). The results of these two studies indicate that concrete benefits derive from informal helping relationships among members of nuclear families. (Author)

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Helping Relationships in Families: The Moderators Between Stress and Well-being[1]

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Abstract

Members of nuclear families often look to one another for understanding, support and assistance in times of stress. Relationships between spouses and between parents and children contain the conditions required for effective counselling and helping. This paper presents the results of two tests of the hypothesis that such helping relationships in families act as moderators between the experienced stress and resultant well-being of family members.

In the first study, 89 married husband-wife pairs indicated (1) the amount of stress they experienced in their jobs and daily living, (2) their satisfaction with the help they received from their spouses, and (3) perceptions of their satisfaction and well-being in four areas: job, life, marriage, and mental and physical well-being. The satisfaction with help measures were significantly correlated with the well-being measures, controlling for levels of experienced stress.

In the second study 274 male and female adolescents indicated (1) the amount of stress they experienced in their day-to-day living, (2) their satisfaction with the help they received from their mothers, fathers, and peers, and (3) perceptions of their well-being in three conceptually distinct areas (life satisfaction, various affective states, and mental and physical well-being). The satisfaction with help measures were significantly correlated with the well-being measures, controlling for levels of experienced stress. In addition, the help from each of the three sources was found to be equally beneficial. Taken together, the results of these two studies indicate that concrete benefits derive from informal helping

relationships among members of nuclear families.

Helping Relationships in Families: The Moderators Between Stress and Well-being[1]

Submitted August 24, 1976

Members of families often look to one another for understanding, support and assistance in times of stress (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Burke and Weir, 1975; Burke and Weir, 1976; Burke, Weir and Harrison, 1976; Douvan and Adelson, 1966). Family relationships, based on mutual affection, commitment and accessibility contain many of the ingredients necessary for effective counselling and helping. Almost by definition spouses are interested in helping each other maintain a high quality of daily living; the same holds true for parents and their children. Although the preceding are pleasant sentiments, they are far from being a reality in many contemporary families. From simple observation it is clear that while some families fulfill this helping furction for one another more admirably than others, some families do not fulfill it at all. However, little attention has been given to the concept of informal helping relationships within families by social researchers, and it is only recently that the significance of this activity for the quality of life of family members has begun to surface.

Let us first consider the literature on the husband-wife helping relationship. The few studies which do exist have attempted to identify some of the demographic, attitudinal and behavioral factors related to marital helping. Thus, Blood and Wolfe, collecting data from 909 women, discovered that a larger proportion of rural women told their husbands

their problems than urban women; that there is a steady decline in the frequency of wives turning to their husbands the longer the couples have been married, that wives of higher status couples tend to communicate their troubles more than wives of lower status couples; that wives of syncratic couples turn to their husbands for help more frequently than wives of wife-dominant, husband-dominant or autonomous couples; that working wives on the average turn to husbands more with their problems than do housewives. Burke and Weir (1976) in a later study which included data from both husbands and wives supported many of the same findings. In addition, they found that couples' disclosure of problems and tensions was related to how well they communicated more generally.

These same researchers (Burke, Weir & Harrison, 1976; Blood & Wolfe, 1960) examined the rationales given by husbands and wives for disclosing their problems and tensions to one another. In summary, the primary reasons given were: for unburdening or catharsis, to seek advice or solutions, to increase spouse's understanding of his partner and his response appropriateness, to continue the established norm of sharing all experiences with the spouse, feeling obligated to tell, and telling out of force of habit.

In looking directly at the helping activity, Burke and Weir found that greater satisfaction with marital helping was associated with greater self disclosure, greater trust and mutual reliance, the possession of a larger repertoire of potentially helpful behaviors and more actively practising these behaviors. Additionally, in considering the impact of

marital helping on the lives of married individuals, they found that the greater the satisfaction with helping reported by marital couples, the greater their expressed life and marital satisfaction and the more positive their well-being.

Let us now consider the role of parents as their children move from childhood through adolescence to young adulthood. Adolescence, in particular, is a critical but frequently stormy period of human development. It is marked by rapid physiological and psychological changes, an intense search for one's identity and an accelerated preparation for one's mature social role (Douvan and Adelson, 1966; Hardy and Cull, 1974). The fact that these occur in concert creates a constantly shifting internal and external reality which an adolescent has to deal with and adapt to. As diverse demands and changes impinge on him, he experiences confusions, frustrations and conflicts which demand attention and redress, but, which he is as yet, poorly prepared to deal with (Joyce, 1966). To successfully cope with and resolve these situations he needs the help and support of others in his social environment. This non-psychiatric help, as Dalrymple (1961) puts it, can be effective therapy and can help adolescents grow into more effective, comfortable beings. Parents, then, are in an ideal position to help their children deal with the difficulties and stress in their daily living.

On the basis of these findings, the informal helping relationship in families is hypothesized to act as a moderator between the stress experienced by individual family members and their resultant well-being. The present paper presents the results of tests of this hypothesis in two investigations

involving (1) husbands and wives, and (2) adolescents and their parents and peers.

STUDY I

Subjects.

The respondents in this study were 189 married husband-wife pairs. The husbands were employed full-time and were members of one of three professional associations: engineers (N=54), industrial accountants (N=74) or chartered accountants (N=61). Three hundred male members were randomly selected from the membership roster of each of these associations and asked to participate in the research. All resided in the province of Ontario and the largest group lived in Toronto and its suburbs. Approximately 28% of the wives were employed full or part-time (N=54) and about half of the couples had children (N=89).

Procedure.

Two questionnaires, both approximately twenty pages long were sent to each male subject at his home address. A cover letter explained the general purpose of the research and how the names were obtained. It also indicated that one of the questionnaires, sealed in its own envelope, was to be completed independently by the wife. Completed questionnaires were then to be mailed back separately to the researchers.

There were a number of standard demographic items such as age, education, income, length of time married, number of children and wife's employment status. Figure 1 (a model showing the framework underlying this study) indicates specific variables which were examined to assess potential benefits of spouse's helping.

Enter Figure 1 about here

Measures of Stress

(1) Job Stress Respondents were asked to indicate how bothered or concerned they were about particular aspects of their work and their jobs. These aspects, fifteen in number, involved such things as "feeling that I have too little authority to carry out responsibilities assigned to me", "feeling that I have too heavy a workload, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day", "not knowing what my supervisor thinks of me, how he evaluates my performance", among others. Four response alternatives of Likert-scale format, were provided. These ranged from "Never-bothered by it" (1) to "Frequently bothered by it" (4). Responses to the fifteen items were summed into an index measure of Job Stress. This measure has been used previously by Kahn et al. (1964), and Indik, Seashore and Slesinger (1963).

(2) Life Stress Respondents indicated the extent to which they were bothered or worried about twelve different aspects of their home situation (that is, off-the-job). These included such things as "possibility of having a major expense of some

kind that I can't handle", "feeling that I am 'in a rut'", "sickness in my family", "increasing difficulties in communicating with and showing affection for my spouse", etc. Four response alternatives of Likert-scale format were provided: these ranged from "Often worry about it" (1) to "Never worry about it" (4). Responses to the twelve items were summed into an index measure of Life Stress. These two index measures (Job, Life Stress) were combined into a composite measure of total stress. The two pressures (job, life) were significantly related to each other, .31 and .44, respectively for husbands and wives.

Satisfaction with Informal Help of Spouse

Respondents indicated their satisfaction with the informal help they received from their spouses (a one-item measure) by endorsing one of six Likert-type alternatives. These ranged from "I am very satisfied with the way my spouse helps me cope with my tensions. He/She does a great job." (1), through "I am somewhat satisfied. My husband does a fairly good job." (3), to "I am very dissatisfied with the way my spouse helps me cope with my tensions. He does a poor job at this." (6). Burke and Weir (1976) have previously shown this global evaluation to be significantly related to a number of specific husband-and-wife helping behaviors.

Measures of well-being

Four conceptually distinct areas were examined:

(1) Mental and physical well-being was assessed by a 19-item scale used earlier by Gurin, Veroff and Feld (1960). Respondents indicated their responses to a series of statements

about their general well-being. Items included such things as: "Are you troubled by headaches or pains in the head?", "Are you bothered by all sorts of aches, pains and ailments in different parts of your body?", "Do your hands ever tremble enough to bother you?", "How often are you bothered by acid indigestion, heart-burn or acid stomach?". The responses were five-Likert-type alternatives, ranging from "Never" (1), through "Sometimes" (3), to "Nearly Always" (5). Responses to the 19-items were combined to form an index measure of mental and physical well-being.

(2) Marital satisfaction was assessed by a 15-item scale developed by Locke and Wallace (1959). This scale, consisting of 16 items, uses two response formats. One item asks the respondents to indicate the degree of happiness, everything considered, of their present marriage on a 7 point scale anchored at the extremes by "Very unhappy" and "Perfectly happy", and in the middle by "Happy". Respondents then indicated the approximate extent of agreement and disagreement between themselves and their spouse on 8 items (handling family finances, demonstration of affection, philosophy of life, etc.). Six alternatives of Likert scale format were provided, ranging from "Always agree" (1), through "Occasionally disagree" (3), to "Always disagree" (6). Finally, seven items examined general evaluations of the present marriage (e.g., wishing you had not married, prefer to marry a different or the same person) and specific areas of husband-wife interaction (e.g., confiding in spouse, engaging in outside interests together, ways disagreements are resolved). Responses to these 16 items were summed, using a weighting procedure proposed and developed by Locke and Wallace, to provide an

index measure of marital satisfaction.

(3) Life satisfaction was measured by four items of Likert-scale format which were summed into an index measure of satisfaction with life: satisfaction with family and home life, the way you spend your time when you're not working, life in general, and feeling that you have had good breaks in life or bad breaks. Response alternatives were five in number, and ranged from "Completely satisfied with life" (1), through "Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" (3), to "Very dissatisfied with life" (5).

(4) Job Satisfaction was measured by twelve items of Likert-type format. Respondents indicated the extent their present job provided opportunities for "making full use of my present knowledge and skills", "earning a good salary", "having congenial co-workers as colleagues", "a job that will last and will let me plan for retirement", etc. Response alternatives were five in number and ranged from "Slight" (1), through "Considerable" (3), to "Utmost" (5). Responses to the twelve items were summed to form an index measure of job satisfaction.

Results

Satisfaction with Spouse's Help and Well-being

The model outlined in Figure 1 suggests a direct relationship between the satisfaction an individual reports with his/her spouse's help and the measures of well-being. Table 1 presents these correlations. Eleven of the 12 zero-order correlations are significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence or better. Thus husbands and wives (and pairs) who were

more satisfied with the amount and kind of informal help provided by their spouse were also more satisfied with their jobs, their lives, and their marriages, and reported fewer psychosomatic complaints.

Enter Table 1 About Here

Stress and Well-being

Table 2 presents the correlations between the two measures of stress (job, life), and their composite, and the measures of well-being. Supporting earlier research, these data show that experienced stress is significantly related to measures of well-being. Thirty-two of the 36 correlations are significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence or better. Thus, in general, individuals reporting greater life and job stress were also less satisfied with their life and job situations, their marriages, and reported more psychosomatic symptoms.

Enter Table 2 about here

Stress and Satisfaction with Spouse's Help

The relationships between the amount of stress these individuals experienced and their satisfaction with their spouse's help were then examined. These data are presented in Table 3. Six of the 9 correlations are significantly different from zero, indicating that, in general, individuals who reported greater satisfaction with their spouse's help also experienced less stress. These data also suggest that the relationship reported

in Table 1 between satisfaction with spouse's help and the measures of well-being, might be a function of the fact that those individuals who were more satisfied with their spouse's help also experienced less stress.

Enter Table 3 about here

Table 4 shows the relationship of husbands and wives satisfaction with their spouse's help and the four measures of well-being partialling out the effects of levels of experienced stress. Once again the majority of the correlations presented, 33 of 36 (90%), reach statistical significance. And the drop in size of correlations resulting from controlling the effect of levels of experienced stress is slight (compare Tables 1 and 4).

Enter Table 4 about here

Benefits of Spouse's Help under High and Low Experienced Stress

It was hypothesized that the beneficial effects of spouse's informal helping would be more evident under conditions of high experienced stress than under low experienced stress conditions. In operational terms, satisfaction with spouse's help was expected to be more strongly related to the four measures of well-being (controlling for level of experienced stress) under conditions of high experienced stress than low experienced stress. To test this, the samples of husbands, wives, and pairs were divided separately at the median into high and low stress groups for

each stress measure (job, life and composite). Then the correlations between the satisfaction with spouse's help measures and the four well-being measures were determined, partialling out the effects of level of experienced stress. The magnitude of correlations of the same variables obtained in the two groups were then compared. If the effects of experienced stress was found to make no difference, one would expect that the correlations between the satisfaction with spouse's help measure and the well-being measures to be larger in the high stress group than in the low stress group about 50 percent of the time. In fact, we found that 72 percent of the obtained correlations were larger in the high stress group (26 out of 36), a difference significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence.

Discussion

From the results then, it is evident that those subjects both male and female, who reported experiencing greater stress in different areas of their lives were likely to be less satisfied with their marriages and life in general, and gave signs of being in poorer health. These data support current thinking on the relationship of life stresses and psychological and physiological well being as discussed in contemporary literature (Selye, 1976; Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1975).

On examining the findings further, it is apparent that the degree of satisfaction individuals report with marital helping is related to both the stress and well being variables. Thus, those individuals who were most satisfied with the help they

received from their spouses reported experiencing less stress in their lives. They also had more positive attitudes towards their marriages and life in general, and appeared to have significantly fewer psychosomatic complaints. The effect of helping on well being was evident even when stress levels were held constant, suggesting that the marital helping process has a positive influence on individuals independent of the degree of stress experienced. However, it is also important to note that the impact of marital helping on the well being of married individuals was more pronounced under conditions of high stress than under low stress conditions. This data supports the notion that marital helping can be viewed as a moderator of the relationship between stress and well being, influencing the degree to which stress will be translated into psychophysical symptomatology.

An overview of the results suggests that good marital helping performs a dual function for individuals. One of these functions, reflected in the consistent relationship between helping and well-being, is a preventative one. The other, as reflected in the moderating effects of helping, may be described as a therapeutic function. Thus marital helping may offer an individual evidence of support, reassurance and personal validation which in turn contributes to one's self confidence and sense of security in dealing with the demands of daily living. This in turn is likely to promote a more positive view of the world and a continued sense of well-being. In addition, marital helping may provide the process by which problems, and anxieties can be brought into focus, clarified and resolved so they do

not persist or accumulate to the point of affecting an individual's attitudes, behaviors and health.

STUDY II

The focus of the present study was to explore the informal helping relationships adolescents get involved in when they have problems and difficulties or feel they are under stress. The following questions were of particular interest: (1) Who do adolescents perceive to be important sources of help to them; (2) How important is the parent's role in this regard; and (3) What are the real benefits of informal help relationships to the adolescents involved as recipients of the helping?

Figure 2 presents a model of the framework underlying this study. There are three panels of variables: (1) experienced stress, (2) adolescents' helping relationships, (3) measures of strain. The model outlines the expected relationships between the panels of variables by means of the arrows. Adolescents' helping relationships are visualized as an important variable mitigating the relationships between the stress experienced by adolescents and their resultant well-being.

Enter Figure 2 about here

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 274 high school students, 93 males and 181 females, from grades 9 through 13. Students ranged in age from 13 to 20 years with a mean age of 16.3 years. Eighty-five percent of the sample were living with both parents; 11% were

living with one parent, either mother or father; and 4% were living with someone other than parents. Mothers' ages ranged from less than 35 to between 56 and 60; fathers' ages ranged from less than 35 to over 60. Fathers, in addition to being older were slightly better educated. Ninety-three percent of the fathers were employed full time; fifty-four percent of the mothers were employed outside the home (34% full time, 20% part-time). Family incomes covered a wide range - under $5,000 to over $25,000 per annum. Finally, the vast majority (approximately 99%) of the sample had one or more siblings. Since there were no significant sex differences on the demographic variables, the male and female respondents were treated as one subject group.

Procedure

The subject sample was drawn from three secondary schools in or near the Metropolitan Toronto area. The schools differed from one another to the extent that they represented (1) a centrol-core area school, (2) an older suburban school, and (3) a new suburban school. The study was explained to administrative officials and teachers in these schools and their cooperation was requested. All agreed to cooperate by making students in particular classes available during regular class time to fill out a lengthy questionnaire. The students received a brief introduction to the study and were told that participation was voluntary.

Respondents were asked to rank order the three people they were most likely to go to for help with problems or difficulties that were stressful to them. A list of 17 potential helpers was provided which included such individuals as parents, teachers, a

clergyman, a close friend and so on. The category "other" was also included so that respondents could refer to a person who might not be listed.

Measures of Stress

Respondents were asked to indicate how bothered or concerned they were about twenty-six separate aspects of their life. The aspects selected were those generally referred to as particular problems of adolescents in the academic and popular literature (Douvan and Adelson, 1966). They included such items as "concern about my performance in school", "concern about what others think of me", "feeling awkward in social situations", "concern about the way I look", "not knowing what I want to do with my life", etc. Respondents indicated how much they were concerned or bothered by each of the potential problem areas by endorsing one of five Likert-type alternatives. These ranged from "almost never bothered by it" (1) through "sometimes bothered by it" (3) to "almost always bothered by it" (5).

Satisfaction with Informal Help

Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the help they received from (1) their mothers, (2) their fathers, and (3) some other individual who was a helper to them. Their alternatives on a six point Likert-type scale ranged from (1) "I am very satisfied with the way she/he helps me cope or deal with my problems" through (3) "I am somewhat satisfied-------" to (6) I am very dissatisfied with the way she/he helps me cope or deal with my problems".

A composite measure of satisfaction with help was obtained by summing the responses over each of the three helpers (mother, father and other).

Measures of Well-being

Three conceptually distinct areas of well-being were examined:

(1) Satisfaction with Life

This measure, derived in part from earlier research by Bachman et.al.(1970), contained 7 items. Five of these focused on respondent's satisfaction with specific areas of his life (e.g. friendships, family and home life, leisure time). Two of the items tapped more global aspects: their satisfaction with life in general, and whether they felt they had good or bad breaks in life. Respondents indicated their degree of satisfaction on a five-point Likert-type scale. The alternatives ranged from (1) "completely satisfied", through (3) "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" to (5) "very dissatisfied". Responses to the seven items were summed to from an index measure of satisfaction with life.

(2) Mental and physical well-being

This was assessed by a 17-item scale used in earlier research by Gurin, Veroff and Feld (1960). Respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements about their general well-being. Items included such things as "Are you bothered by all sorts of aches, pains and ailments in different parts of your body?". "Do your hands ever tremble enough to bother you?". "Do you find it difficult to get up in the morning?", and "Are you ever troubled by headaches or pains in the head?". Their responses were recorded on five-point Likert-type scales, the alternatives ranging from "Never" (1), through "Sometimes" (3) to "Nearly Always" (5). Responses to the seventeen items were combined to form an index measure of mental and physical well-being.

(3) Affective States

The affective states of our respondents were examined using measures which Bachman and his colleagues (Bachman et al. 1970) developed in a longitudinal study of high school students. The measures were designed to evaluate 11 affective states: Emotional Dependence (6 items), Impulse to Aggression (4 items) Overt Aggression (3 items), Depression (6 items), Anomie (8 items), General Anxiety (7 items), Resentment (7 items), Anxiety and Tension (5 items), Irritability (8 items), Guilt (5 items), and Lack of Social Support (4 items). A 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) "almost always true" through to (5) "never true" was used for each item. Respondents were asked to indicate how true each item (e.g., I feel sad) was of them.

Results

Three Most Important Helpers

In response to the item which asked respondents to select and rank the three people they would choose as helpers, the data showed the following: First, peers received 52 percent of the first choices; followed by mothers, who received about thirty percent of the first place choices; followed by fathers, who received seven percent of the first place choices. A wide range of other adult helpers, both lay and professional, accounted for the remaining first choices (11 percent). Of these, professional therapists and adult relatives accounted for 2% of the first choices each. School counsellors accounted for less than 1% of the first choices. Roughly similar patterns emerged in the distribution of second and third choices. These data indicate that for the typical adolescent, the most valued informal helping came from parents and peers.

Measures of Stress

Responses to the twenty-six statements assessing the degree of stress the adolescents experienced in their day-to-day living were factor analyzed, using a principal components varimax rotation method. Seven factors, accounting for 61 percent of the variance, emerged. These seven factors, the number of items loading above .40 on each, and the internal consistency (coefficient alpha) of each factor, are shown in the top half of Table 5. An acceptable level of reliability was present in all but one case (Future Goals).

Enter Table 5 about here

Cluster scores were computed for each of the seven factors, and their inter-correlations were computed. These results indicated that 18 of the 21 correlation coefficients (86%) were significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence or better. The correlations, all positive in sign, ranged from a low of .07 (Physical Health and Future Goals) to a high of .66 (Peer Acceptance and Isolation and Estrangement). The mean inter-factor correlation was .36. Thus, in general, adolescents who reported experiencing stress or problems in one area of their existence were also more likely to be experiencing stress or problems in the other areas.

Measures of Satisfaction with informal Help of Parents and Peers

The three satisfaction measures were found to be significantly related to one other ($r = .42$, $.27$, and $.25$, $p < .001$). Thus, adolescents who were more satisfied with the help they received from their mothers were also more likely to be satisfied with the

help they received from their fathers and their peers. Similarly, adolescents who were satisfied with the help they received from their fathers were also more likely to be satisfied with the help they received from their peers.

Measures of Well-being

The bottom half of Table 5 presents the internal consistency reliability estimates of the thirteen well-being measures. In most cases the reliability exceeded .70, indicating that the index measures possessed an acceptable level of internal consistency. These thirteen measures were inter-correlated and the majority of the correlations (91%) were positive and significantly different from zero ($p < .05$). These correlations ranged from a low of -.04 (Overt Aggression and Lack of Social Support) to a high of .75 (Anomie and Resentment); the mean inter-measure correlation was .36. Thus, adolescents who reported a positive or favourable standing in one area of well-being were also likely to report positive standings on all the other areas as well.

Satisfaction with Informal Help and Well-being

Table 6 presents the correlations between the satisfaction adolescents reported with each of the three particular helpers and the various measures of well-being. Twenty three of the 39 correlations (59%) were significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence or better. Thus, in general adolescents who were more satisfied with the informal help provided by the three sources indicated that they were also more satisfied with life in general, reported fewer psychosomatic symptoms and fewer negative affective states. An interesting finding was that there

were more significant relationships relating to mother's help (11) than relating to father's help (9) or peers (2). This suggested that mothers' help may have most impact on the well-being of adolescents, closely followed by fathers, with peers having the least influence.

Enter Table 6 about here

Stress and Well-being

Table 7 presents the correlations between the 7 stress factors and the various measures of well-being. These data clearly show that experienced stress is negatively and significantly related to measures of well-being. Eighty of the 91 correlations (89%) are significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence. Thus, in general, adolescents reporting greater stresses in their lives were also less satisfied with their lives, were likely to report more psychosomatic symptoms, and more instances of negative affective states.

Enter Table 7 About here

The extreme right-hand column of Table 4 presents the correlations between the total stress index (the sum of the seven factors) and the three measures of well-being. All are significantly different from zero, most at the .001 level of confidence.

Stress and Satisfaction with Help of Parents and Peers

The relationships between the amount of stress adolescents experienced and their satisfaction with the help they received

from each of the three sources were examined. These data are presented in Table 8. About sixty percent of the correlations (12 of 21) were significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence or better. These results indicate that, in general, adolescents who were more satisfied with the help received from each of the three sources also reported experiencing less stress. These data also suggest that the relationships reported in Table 3 between the satisfaction with informal help measures and the measures of well-being, might be a function of the fact that those individuals who were more satisfied with the informal help they received also experienced less stress.

Enter Table 8 about here

Controlling for Total Experienced Stress

Table 9 shows the relationship of the satisfaction with informal help measures and the various measures of well-being, partialling out the effects of total experienced stress. Sixteen of the thirty-nine correlations are significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence (approx. 40%). In this instance, the three helpers accounted for approximately the same number of significant relationships (mother 5; father 5; peers 6). This would seem to suggest that under conditions controlling for total stress, the influence of mothers, fathers and peers help on an adolescents well-being is the same.

Enter Table 9 about here

Benefits of Informal Help under High and Low Experienced Stress

A further analysis was carried out to determine whether the beneficial effects of informal helping would be different under conditions of high experienced stress than under low experienced stress conditions. This seemed to be a plausible expectation given the previous findings. In operational terms, the three measures of satisfaction with a specific person's help were expected to be more strongly related to the various measures of well-being (controlling for levels of experienced stress) under conditions of high experienced stress than low experienced stress. To test this, the sample of adolescents was divided at the median on the total stress measure into high and low stress sub-groups. The correlation between the three satisfaction with informal help measures and the measures of well-being were determined separately for each of the high and low stress groups, partialling out the effects of experienced stress. The magnitude of the correlations of the same variables obtained in the two groups were then compared. If the effects of experienced stress was found to make no difference, one would expect that the correlations in the high stress group would be larger than in the low stress group 50 percent of the time. In fact we found 62% of the correlations were higher in the high stress group. This percentage is significantly different ($p < .05$) from an expected percentage of 50%.

Discussion

The results clearly point out that adolescents view their parents and peers as their most valuable helpers, to be called upon when problems and anxieties arise. Although adolescents are in a period where they are expanding their relationships, their closest relationships to date are probably still those with family

members, with peer relationships becoming increasingly important.

A further examination of the findings indicate strong support for the model (Figure 2) underlying this study. First of all, the degree of stress which adolescents reported was directly and significantly related tc measures of their health and well-being. This is in line with current thinking on the relationship between stress and physical and psychological disturbance or pathology (Selye, 1976; Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1975). Secondly, adolescents who expressed greater satisfaction with the help provided by their parents and peers reported experiencing less stress in their lives. Although direction of causality has not been determined, one could postulate that informal helping has a preventative or therapeutic potential, the effect of which can mitigate the stresses arising for adolesence in their daily living. Certainly the research literature suggests that lay helpers can be as effective as professional helpers in having a therapeutic effect for individuals in distress (Brammer 1976; Carkhuff, 1970). Another finding was that adolescents who reported greater satisfaction with the help of their parents and peers also showed evidence of greater satisfaction with life, more positive affective states, and fewer indications of psycho-physical symptomatology. These relationships remained when controlling for levels of experienced stress, attesting to the positive influence of helping.

Adolescents who have good helpers to rely on clearly reap important benefit from these relationships. There are a number of ways in which helping relationships can contribute to the welfare and well being of the adolescent. Because of his immaturity and because of the changes which pressure him, the adol-

escent is vulnerable to conflicts, confusions and anxieties. A helper can offer an adolescent emotional support and concrete help to confront and deal with these emotions and the conditions which caused them. He can offer a sympathetic ear and understanding, assurance of continued acceptance and affection, and reassurance that his problems and feelings are manageable. In addition, adults in particular can help bring an objective reality to the adolescent's perspective when he may be obsessed with his own subjective distress. By modelling and guidance, they can educate the adolescents in the complexities of problem solving, decision making, setting goals, making choices, and evaluating beliefs and values. All in all, helpers have the potential of giving an adolescent a sense of security through knowing that he is not alone with his turmoil; they can help him maintain a sense of self worth even in the face of a fluid self image; they can give him a sense of "becoming" rather than of being ineffectual or a failure, and they can help him develop a sense of his own competence through demonstrating and teaching more effective coping skills. Each of these can operate to diminish the crisis nature and intensity of the problems and feelings faced by adolescents. As a result the threat and anxiety felt by the adolescent may be reduced and day to day living can be approached confidently and optimistically, rather than with uncertainty and frustration.

Helping relationships in families then appear to have a significant impact on the lives of the family members. The potential benefits are important ones and warrant an increased emphasis on this aspect of relationships. By heightening

people's awareness of their potential value to others, by encouraging them to develop their helping skills, another non professional resource can be activated to promote the well being of individuals in our society.

Footnotes

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Figure 1

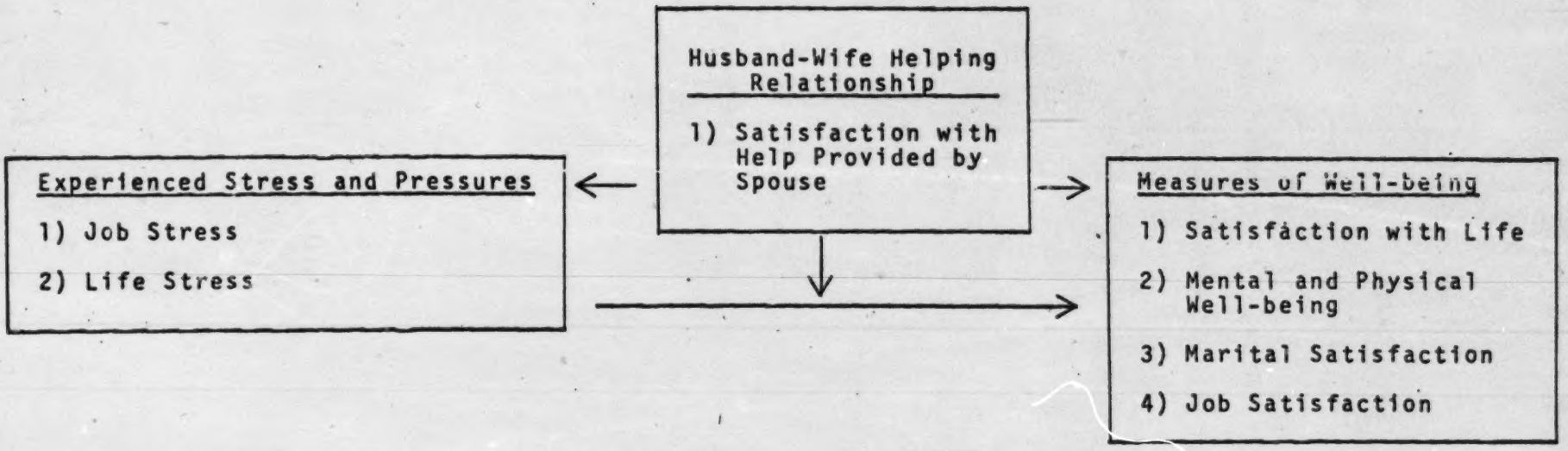
Husband-Wife Helping Relationship
1) Satisfaction with Help Provided by Spouse
Experienced Stress and Pressures
1) Job Stress
2) Life Stress
Measures of Well-being
1) Satisfaction with Life
2) Mental and Physical Well-being
3) Marital Satisfaction
4) Job Satisfaction

Figure 2

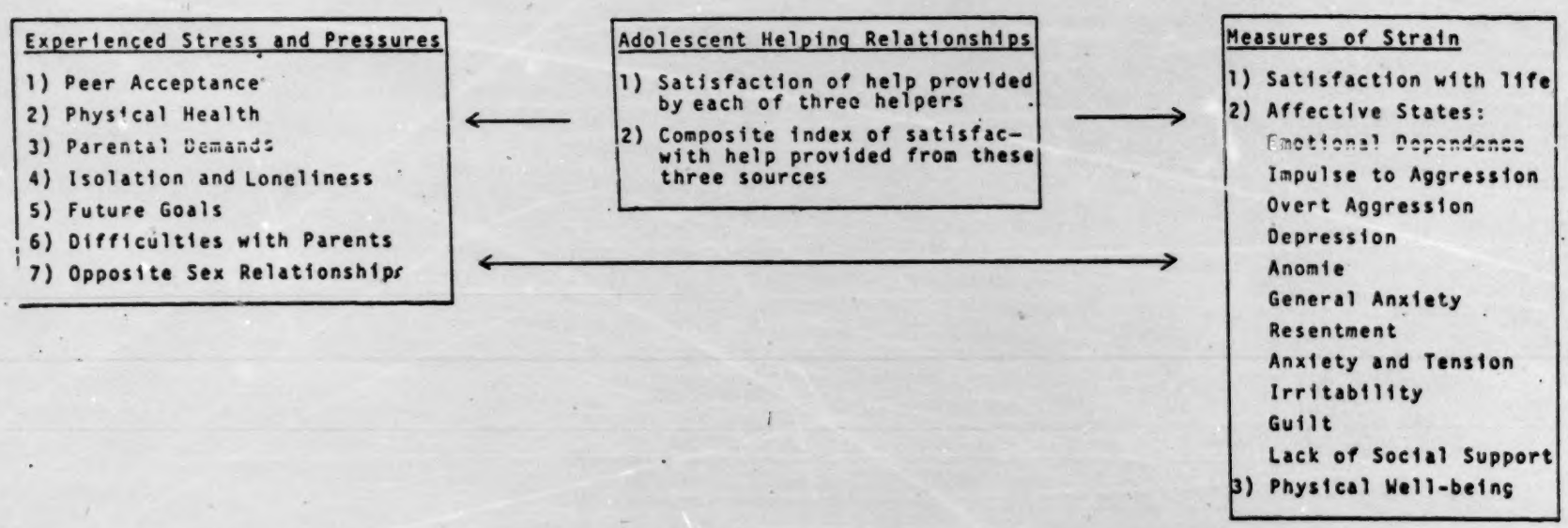
Experienced Stress and Pressures
1) Peer Acceptance
2) Physical Health
3) Parental Demands
4) Isolation and Loneliness
5) Future Goals
6) Difficulties with Parents
7) Opposite Sex Relationships
Adolescent Helping Relationships
1) Satisfaction of help provided by each of three helpers
2) Composite index of satisfac- with help provided from these three sources
Measures of Strain
1) Satisfaction with life
2) Affective States:
Emotional Dependence
Impulse to Aggression
Overt Aggression
Depression
Anomie
General Anxiety
Resentment
Anxiety and Tension
Irritability
Guilt
Lack of Social Support
3) Physical Well-being

Table 1

	Husband's Satisfaction With Wife's Help	Wive's Satisfaction With Husband's Help	Pair Satisfaction With Spouse's Help
Mental and Physical Well-being	.28*	.13	.28**
Job Satisfaction	.42*	.32**	.46*
Satisfaction with Life	.33*	.30*	.38*
Marital Satisfaction	.53*	.55*	.62*

* Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .001 level of confidence, two-tailed test

** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence, two-tailed test

Table 2

Husbands	Mental and Physical Well-being	Job Satis-faction	Satis-faction With Life	Marital Satis-faction
Job Stress	-.30*	.26*	.27*	-.06
Life Stress	-.36*	.29*	.47*	-.32*
Total Stress	-.43*	.36*	.49*	-.20**
Wives				
Job Stress	-.46*	.20**	.48*	-.16***
Life Stress	-.47*	.23**	.44*	-.28*
Total Stress	-.48*	.14	.60*	-.05
Pairs				
Job Stress	-.48*	.20**	.32*	-.12
Life Stress	-.52*	.24*	.46*	-.22**
Total Stress	-.53*	.24*	.51*	-.22**

* Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .001 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

*** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

Table 3

Husbands'	Satisfaction with Wife's Helping
Job Stress	.16**
Life Stress	.35*
Total Stress	.26*

Wives'	Satisfaction with Husband's Helping
Job Stress	.13
Life Stress	.14
Total Stress	.15***

Pairs'	Satisfaction with Spouse's Helping
Job Stress	.12
Life Stress	.22*
Total Stress	.20**

* Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

*** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .10 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

Table 4

Measures of Well-being[a]	Husband's Satisfaction With Wife's Help	Wive's Satisfaction With Husband's Help	Pair Satisfaction With Spouse's Help
Mental and Physical Well-being	.22**	.09	.19***
	.20**	.08	.20**
	.25**	.10	.20**
Job Satisfaction	.35*	.21**	.32*
	.32*	.23**	.34*
	.34*	.23**	.35*
Satisfaction with Life	.20**	.19***	.27*
	.21**	.21**	.29*
	.24**	.23**	.30*
Marital Satisfaction	.41*	.42*	.47*
	.42*	.44*	.48*
	.44*	.43*	.50*

[a] Considering each measure of well-being, the first line partials out job stresses, the second line, life stresses; and the third line, the composite measure.

* Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .001 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

*** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

Table 5

Reliability of Measures Used (Coefficient Alpha)

Measure of Stress	Number of Items	Reliability
Peer Acceptance	6	.81
Physical Health	2	.76
Parental Demands	2	.68
Isolation and Loneliness	5	.81
Future Goals	2	.34
Difficulties with Parents	5	.75
Relationships with Opposite Sex	2	.68
Satisfaction with Informal Helping		
Total Satisfaction with Helpers	3	.57
Measures of Well-being		
Satisfaction with Life	7	.74
Mental and Physical Well-being	17	.84
Emotional Dependence	6	.57
Impulse to Aggression	4	.68
Overt Agression	3	.64
Depression	6	.76
Anomie	8	.83
General Anxiety	7	.78
Resentment	7	.79
Anxiety and Tension	5	.80
Irritability	8	.77
Guilt	5	.78
Lack of Social Support	4	.72

TABLE 6

	Satisfaction With Mother's Help	Satisfaction With Father's Help	Satisfaction With Peer's Help	Total Index Satisfactio With Help
Life Satisfaction	.49*	.34*	.35*	.54*
Physical Well-Being	-.29**	-.30*	-.08	-.32*
Emotional Dependence	-.19**	-.07	.08	-.10
Impulse To Aggression	-.26*	-.26*	-.05	-.33*
Overt Aggression	-.00	-.11	.10	-.03
Depression	-.27**	-.11	-.06	-.20**
Anomie	-.48**	-.31*	-.26*	-.48*
General Anxiety	-.22**	-.22*	-.08	-.26*
Resentment	-.23*	-.25*	-.21*	-.36*
Anxiety and Tension	-.13***	-.15***	-.00	-.14***
Irritability	-.13***	-.20**	-.05	-.20**
Guilt	-.08	-.08	.02	-.08
Lack of Social Support	.14***	.16***	-.00	.16***

* Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .001 level of confidence, one-tailed test

** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence, one-tailed test

*** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence, one-tailed test

Table 7

Experienced Stress and Individual Well-being

	Peer Acceptance	Physical Health	Parental Demands	Isolation & Loneliness	Future Goals	Difficulties with Parents	Relationship with Opposite Sex	Total Stress
Life Satisfaction	.55*	.09	.33*	.57*	.33*	.48*	.31*	.60*
Emotional Dependence	-.18**	-.09	-.15**	-.19*	-.22*	-.18**	-.33*	-.63*
Impulse to Aggression	-.33*	-.09	-.36*	-.38*	-.12***	-.38*	-.25*	-.30*
Overt Aggression	-.06	-.08	-.19*	-.06	.03	-.11***	-.02	-.45*
Depression	-.43*	-.08	-.18**	-.47*	-.16**	-.31*	-.30*	-.15**
Anomie	-.62*	-.20*	-.34*	-.66*	-.26*	-.50*	-.48*	-.47*
General Anxiety	-.62*	-.31*	-.33*	-.62*	-.40*	-.44*	-.58*	-.71*
Resentment	-.56*	-.23*	-.33*	-.63*	-.29*	-.48*	-.42*	-.74*
Anxiety & Tension	-.40*	-.21*	-.24*	-.40*	-.26*	-.29*	-.30*	-.69*
Irritability	-.39*	-.14**	-.26*	-.43*	-.23*	-.25*	-.39*	-.50*
Guilt	-.36*	-.21*	-.15**	-.40*	-.26*	-.32*	-.30*	-.49*
Lack of Social Support	-.31*	-.17**	.06	-.18**	-.16**	-.04	-.27*	-.46*
Physical Well-being	-.49*	-.18**	-.32*	-.55*	-.26*	-.43*	-.44*	-.24*

Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .001 level of confidence, one-tailed test.

* Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence, one-tailed test.

** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence, one-tailed test.

Table 8

Experienced Stress and Satisfaction with Informal Helping Relationships

Life Stresses	Satisfaction with Mother's Help	Satisfaction with Father's Help	Satisfaction with Peer's Help	Total Index of Satisfaction with Help
Peer Acceptance	.30*	.19**	.23*	.33*
Physical Health	-.04	.03	.02	.01
Parental Demands	.30*	.14	.13	.25*
Isolation and Estrangement	.36*	.39*	.27*	.46*
Future Goals	.13	.11	.08	.15**
Difficulties in Parents' Relationship	.42*	.29**	.14***	.40*
Relations with Opposite Sex	.19**	.15***	.01	.20**
Total Stress	.41*	.31*	.17**	.42**

* Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .001 level of confidence, one-tailed test

** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence, one-tailed test

*** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence, one-tailed test

Table 9

	Satisfaction with Mother's Help[a]	Satisfaction with Father's Help	Satisfaction with Peer's Help	Total Index of Satisfaction With Help
Life Satisfaction	.34*	.20*	.31*	.40*
Physical Well-being	-.04	-.14***	.04	-.09
Emotional Dependence	-.08	.02	.14***	.03
Impulse to Aggression	-.10	-.14***	.03	-.17**
Overt Aggression	.06	-.07	.13***	.03
Depression	-.10	.04	.03	.00
Anomie	-.30*	-.14***	-.20*	-.29*
General Anxiety	.13***	.00	.07	.08
Resentment	-.07	-.06	-.13***	-.11***
Anxiety and Tension	.09	.00	.10	.09
Irritability	.09	.06	.04	.01
Guilt	.14***	.07	.12***	.14***
Lack of Social Support	.30*	.25*	.04	.30*

[a] The correlations in the table partial out the effects of total stress.

* Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .001 level of confidence, one-tailed test

** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .01 level of confidence, one-tailed test

*** Correlation is significantly different from zero at the .05 level of confidence, one-tailed test

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